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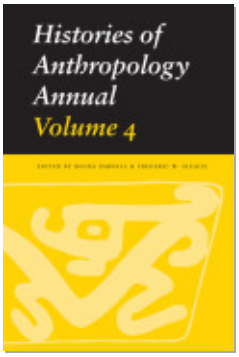

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"This Piece of Authentic Work Many a Novice Has Failed to Get"

Critiquing Anthropological Knowledge in the Montana Writers' Project

Mindy J. Morgan

In the spring of 1941, Mark "Rex" Flying, a member of the Fort Belknap Assiniboine community began interviewing tribal elders as part of a project for the Montana Writers' Program. Flying's official task was to compile a pre-contact history of the tribe. Working with a number of individuals, he collected and translated a variety of oral narratives that ranged from creation stories, to tribal histories, to descriptions of daily camp life. Flying believed that his stories offered a glimpse into authentic Assiniboine culture and were superior to the work of previous researchers to whom he refers to as "novices." In a letter to Michael Kennedy, the state supervisor, about an Assiniboine origin story narrated by Bull Chief, he wrote: "I don't believe I am sure that it has ever been exposed to and recorded by a white man. I feel very fortunate in . . . getting and recording this piece of authentic work which many a novice has failed to get" (Mark Flying to Michael Kennedy, May 28, 1941, MHS). He employs the term "novice" frequently throughout his work and uses it to criticize representations of the tribe by non-Native observers, namely anthropologists. The idea of the novice, of the uninitiated outsider who misrepresents not out of malice, but out of ignorance, appears throughout Flying's letters and texts.

This disavowal of previous researchers makes Flying's writing an early example of a broader critique in which tribal members in the United States have explicitly questioned anthropologists' motives, the methods that they use, and the knowledge that they produce. Many scholars attribute the genesis of this critique to Native American scholars and activists during the late 1960s, most notably Vine Deloria Jr. and his seminal work *Custer Died for Your Sins* (Biolsi and Zimmerman 1997; Strong 2004:344). However, as Flying's letters reveal, this critique had much earlier roots. This interrogation of the discipline by tribal members has both altered and inspired contemporary anthropological practice in important ways; it has induced researchers to acknowledge the dialogic re-

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lationships that produce anthropological knowledge, to develop research questions and protocol in greater collaboration with Native communities, and to foreground Native voices and perspectives in ethnographic texts and analysis.

To be sure, anthropology has always been dialogic, particularly within the Americanist tradition, even if published works of the early twentieth century erased this fundamental detail (Darnell 2001:246). Recognizing this fact, recent scholarship within the history of anthropology has emphasized the role Native consultants played in both eliciting and analyzing ethnographic data, and have sought to recover the voices of the tribal members who were often edited out of final manuscripts (Bauman and Briggs 1999, 2003; Darnell 2001:17–19, DeMallie 1999, Parks 1999). Aware of the criticisms mentioned above, this literature also addresses the complex issue of the co-creation of ethnographic texts between anthropologists and tribal members on whom they relied for community access, translation, and oftentimes the writing of texts themselves. While interpersonal dynamics differed considerably between the various tribal members and anthropologists, these relationships were fundamental in the creation of anthropological knowledge during the first half of the twentieth century.

Mark Flying's work for the Writers' Project resembles these projects, but presents a somewhat different case. Rather than collaborating with anthropologists, Flying framed his own act of collecting as a direct response to the discipline and its practitioners. The importance of Flying's work extends to the manner in which he crafted his critique. In many ways, Flying's methods mirror those of anthropologists trained in the Boasian tradition in that he focuses on the collection of texts; however, his analysis and conclusions differ from those of non-Native researchers. Thus, Flying's work provides not only an example of how individuals received and responded to early twentieth century monographs written about their communities, but also a unique view of anthropologists from the vantage point of a tribal member whose community continually found itself under the discipline's gaze.

This article examines how Flying uses a variety of discursive and metadiscursive strategies that create an authoritative voice that is in direct opposition to the authority claimed by early-twentieth-century ethnographers.[1] I begin with a brief discussion contextualizing Flying's work within the Montana Writers' Program, the state division of the Federal Writers' Project (FWP). From there, I turn to the work of anthropologists whose works provide a necessary context for understanding the critique of researchers that appear in Flying's letters to the state office. In par-

ticular, I examine the work of David Rodnick, an anthropologist trained within the Boasian tradition and employed by the Applied Anthropology Unit of the Bureau of Indian Affairs. Rodnick, whose monograph *The Fort Belknap Assiniboine: A Study in Culture Change* published in 1938 predates Flying's FWP-sponsored work by a few years, is the "novice" to whom Flying directs most of his comments.

Flying carries out his critique in two equally significant ways: first, through the collected texts themselves; and second, through his meta-discursive commentary on the act of collecting in letters that he wrote to the state supervisor. In analyzing the texts, I focus on the discursive framework that Flying employs which is based on Assiniboine conceptions regarding the transmission and dissemination of cultural knowledge. Close attention is paid to the structure of these texts since it is the formal techniques he employs that produce this authority in addition to their content (see Bauman 2001). Throughout his texts, Flying adapts characteristics that are reminiscent of Assiniboine oratorical techniques to the written format of the Writers' Project to generate a response to the social scientific discourse dominant at the time.

In addition to these stories, Flying wrote extensive cover letters to Michael Kennedy, the state supervisor of the Writers' Project, regarding his collection. These letters not only provide insight to Flying's views regarding the importance of his own work, but also commentary on what he perceived to be the failings of previous researchers. Through his positioning in the letters as both an apprentice and as an expert in regard to Assiniboine culture, Flying problematizes the simple insider/outsider dichotomy and casts further doubt on earlier ethnographic texts. Ultimately, the Writers' Project collection illustrates how Flying, in both content and form, created authoritative texts that challenged the social-scientific monographs created by anthropologists.

The Project

The Federal Writers' Project, which was established in 1935 to help provide relief and jobs for writers affected by the depression, legitimated and popularized American regional literature and reflected many of the ideological beliefs central to the New Deal administration. One of the primary tasks of the FWP was to represent the American plurality and make it accessible to the widest audience possible.[2] Subjects that were considered distinctly American but not previously included in the literary canon were incorporated into the Writers' Project, and specific consideration was given to the collection of narratives by ex-slaves, immigrants, and industrial workers.

Despite these claims to inclusion, American Indian tribes were not an explicit focus of the FWP.[3] There were, however, a variety of studies which proposed examining the condition of contemporary reservation communities. These included at least two national acculturation studies: one initiated by the anthropologists, Edward Kennard and Ruth Benedict, in 1936, and another begun in 1941 by Stella Hanau, the director of the Oklahoma project.[4] State offices were given fairly wide latitude in selecting projects that best fit local conditions, and as a result Native communities were also often included in local ethnic and industry studies as well as a number of folklore and oral history projects. These projects varied widely. Some employed non-Native anthropologists as the primary fieldworkers while others hired local tribal members as both fieldworkers and writers. Though a considerable amount of material and information was collected, few of these projects were ever completed or published.

Flying's collection of narratives falls into the large group of materials that remained unpublished. His work was part of a larger program sponsored by the Montana Writers' Program that employed tribal members to record stories and oral histories among six of the state's reservation communities from 1938 until 1941. In 1938 James Larpenteur Long, a clerk and shopkeeper who lived in Oswego, Montana, began collecting stories from members of the Fort Peck Assiniboine community for a history of the tribe that was intended for use in the state's secondary schools. Long was raised by his mother and grandmother at Fort Peck and spoke Assiniboine fluently. He interviewed over twenty tribal elders regarding tribal history and cultural practices which he then compiled into a monograph which was submitted to the national office in 1938. Upon its completion, *Land of Nakoda: The Story of the Assiniboine Indians* was heralded in the national office as being an ideal study of an American Indian community.[5] Encouraged by the positive reception from Washington, Michael Kennedy proposed studies of all of Montana's reservations according to the model of *Land of Nakoda*. From 1939 until 1941 projects were initiated at five Montana Reservations: Blackfeet, Crow, Northern Cheyenne, Rocky Boy, and Fort Belknap Reservations.[6]

In March 1941, the state office requested funds for Writers' Project activity at Fort Belknap. In the description of the project, the director wrote that the task was

> the recording of the near extinct mythology, legends and way of life of the early Ft. Belknap Assiniboine and Gros Ventre as remembered by the oldest members of the tribe. . . . It represents the last opportunity to record in the simple unaffected language

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> of the people themselves, the story of their existence before the white man. (Records of the Works Projects Administration, Box 1809, Central Files, Montana 1935–44, Records Group 69, National Archives)

Hiram Clark, the Superintendent of Fort Belknap Reservation selected Mark Flying and Fred Gone, representing Assiniboine and Gros Ventre communities respectively, for the project. For $59.80 per month, the fieldworkers were supposed to interview elders, compile their stories and submit them to the state office for final editing and typing. Both men were eligible for relief work, and had certification from the Works Project Administration. Flying had previously been assigned to the Building project, and according to Clark was, "more than willing to be transferred to the Writers' Project." Gone had been certified for relief work in February 1941, and the Writers' Project was his first assignment. Clark noted that Gone had considerable interest in "Indian history, legends, and lore" and was "capable of reproducing many unwritten Indian stories" (H. N. Clark to Michael Kennedy, March 6, 1941, NARA-DEN).

Although the fieldworkers had been highly recommended by Clark and had both expressed enthusiasm for the job, they encountered problems in starting the project. In April, Clark wrote to Kennedy, "Both men, though capable of doing the work, seem a bit discouraged due to the fact that some of the older Indians are a bit reticent in telling their old stories" (H. N. Clark to Michael Kennedy, April 17, 1941, NARA-DEN.) Flying's letters to Kennedy reflected problems as well. Referring to an *Iktomi* (Trickster) story, he wrote, "I do not consider this story complete as I know there are other versions of this story if I can only connect up with the right party." In the same letter, he also discusses the difficulty in traveling to the various reservation districts, and reminds Kennedy that the Assiniboine are "scattered over the state of Montana, Alberta, and Saskatchewan of Canada" (Mark Flying to Michael Kennedy, April 22, 1941, MHS). Despite these obstacles, both men submitted a number of stories to the state office by the end of the summer.

Shortly after the project at Fort Belknap began there was a sharp curtailment of FWP projects throughout the country as a result of United States involvement in World War II. In 1942 state offices began to direct their attention toward publishing materials directly related to the war effort. When the national office asked the state offices for an assessment of planned projects in January 1942, Kennedy stated that work on the Indian series was progressing and that the Gros Ventre collection was nearing completion. By September, however, all editorial work on the Indian series had ceased. The collected texts were never published

as intended, but instead were returned to the state offices. The majority of the project materials, including Flying's correspondence and original texts were returned to the Montana State Historical Society in Helena. Portions of both Flying and Gone's collections were eventually published by the Fort Belknap Education Department in the 1980s as part of a larger project concentrating on developing community-based and culturally relevant curriculum materials. These works, *War Stories of the White Clay People* and *Assiniboine Memories: Legends of the Nakota People*, are still circulated within the community today and are valued as cultural resources (Morgan 2005:75).

The Novices

Flying's collection of texts coincided with the publication of ethnographic monographs that also concerned the Fort Belknap Assiniboine community. Fort Belknap, in fact, has been the site of considerable anthropological research since the beginning of the twentieth century.[7] In the early 1900s, Fort Belknap was visited by two of Franz Boas's first students, Alfred Kroeber and Robert Lowie. Working with the Gros Ventre and Assiniboine communities respectively, both men had monographs published by the American Museum of Natural History.[8] In 1938 John Cooper and Regina Flannery began their fieldwork among the Gros Ventre community that would eventually result in the publication of their two part series entitled *The Gros Ventre of Montana* (Cooper 1957; Flannery 1953). By the 1940s, residents were well acquainted with anthropologists and other social scientists interviewing elders, eliciting vocabularies, and collecting information regarding pre-contact cultural practices.

At this same time, social sciences, particularly anthropology, were exerting significant influence on Indian policy. The Indian Reorganization Act (IRA), which allowed for greater self-determination and political autonomy for tribes, was passed by congress in 1934 largely due to the efforts of John Collier, who served as commissioner of Indian Affairs from 1933 to 1945. Collier was greatly influenced by anthropology and believed that the knowledge produced by the discipline could be used to shape responsible public policy. In 1935 Collier established the Applied Anthropology Unit (AAU) and named Yale-trained anthropologist H. Scudder Meekel to head the new department.[9] Anthropologists in the AAU served as field consultants to report on the impact of proposed changes of the IRA on tribes as well as general reservation conditions. A circular for the AAU entitled *Instructions to Field Workers* contained a letter from Collier explaining the necessity of continuing anthropologi-

cal research among tribal communities. He writes, "For sound administration it is important that this Bureau keep a constant check up of an objective social-science nature on the effects of its policies on the Indians themselves—particularly of such far-reaching policies as those embodied in the Indian Reorganization act" (July 9, 1936, Bureau of Catholic Indian Missions 16/1/4, Marquette University, Box 15, Folder 4, p. 2). As a result of this focus on anthropology by the Bureau, Flying's writings need to be read as a response not only to previous fieldwork and published monographs concerning the Fort Belknap community, but also to the relationship between anthropological knowledge and institutions of power on the reservation.

Although not explicitly named, the "novice" that Flying references in his letters to Kennedy is most likely David Rodnick. Similar to Scudder Meekel, Rodnick studied anthropology under Edward Sapir and Clark Wissler at Yale University. Rodnick then followed Meekel into work with the AAU.[10] Unlike Robert Lowie's work, which was based on fieldwork among many Assiniboine communities including Fort Belknap, Fort Peck, and Carry-the-Kettle Reserve, Rodnick's research focused almost exclusively on the Lodgepole community at Fort Belknap where Flying lived. Using a small grant from the American Museum, Rodnick visited the reservation in 1935 and published articles in the *American Anthropologist* based on his fieldwork.

One of these articles, "An Assiniboine Horse-Raiding Expedition," illustrates a Boasian approach to cultural description in that it focuses exclusively on memories of pre-reservation practices. Rodnick based the article on an interview with Returning Hunter, an elderly man who participated in a horse-raiding party against the Piegans in the late 1860s. The article chronicles not only Returning Hunter's actions, but also the importance of individual spirit-quests and visions in securing success for war-parties (Rodnick 1939). In "Political Structure and Status among the Assiniboine Indians" Rodnick again focuses on pre-reservation social structures, this time analyzing band organization and political structure and hierarchy (Rodnick 1937).

His principal work, however, was *The Fort Belknap Assiniboine of Montana: A Study in Culture Change*, which served as his thesis at the University of Pennsylvania.[11] In addition to a lengthy historical section which synthesizes previous descriptions of the Assiniboine, the monograph includes a comprehensive description of community life at Fort Belknap in the 1930s and contains descriptions of economic, social, and political conditions on the reservation. Its main focus, however, is on the changes that the Assiniboine community had undergone in the first

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decades of the twentieth century. Rodnick's primary thesis as stated in his preface is that Assiniboine culture has historically been marked by a high degree of adaptiveness and that the current period in which Assiniboine beliefs are being abandoned in favor of Euro-American traditions should be seen as a continuation of their propensity to adopt the ways of others (Rodnick 1938). This thesis illustrates Rodnick's intellectual genealogy and strong theoretical orientation toward the Americanist idea of cultures as integrated wholes. This approach, which reached its ascendancy with the publication of Ruth Benedict's *Patterns of Culture* in 1934, argued that every community had its own particular "configuration" by which cultural traits could be explained.[12] While this relativistic approach maintained that every culture was internally cohesive, it also had the tendency to ignore the very real and very messy realities of contemporary reservation life (Biolsi 1997: 139–140). For Rodnick, primordial Assiniboine adaptiveness was used to explain everything from economy to educational practices.

Rodnick also espoused the belief that the discipline's primary contribution to science was comprehensive cultural description. Rodnick voiced this perspective through a critique of Ella Deloria, who was both a Dakota scholar and student of Boas. In a letter to Ruth Benedict about Deloria's Assiniboine material, Rodnick writes,

> With her background in Teton [Lakota] culture, I did feel that she could have been less naïve in writing down Assiniboine ethnology and a trifle more critical. . . . There were times when I felt quite certain that she was interpreting Assiniboine culture with her Teton frame-of-reference, a rather unscientific thing to do. (Rodnick to Benedict, March 4, 1935, Benedict Papers, 33:7)

According to his view, cultural descriptions were to be precise and exacting with comparisons only occurring after a culture had been captured in its entirety. While this perspective did privilege emic categories, Rodnick's comments reinforced the idea that communities were tightly-bounded entities whose cultural integrity was threatened by external influences.[13]

While his overall intention was to examine how the Assiniboine community reacted to change and he eschews the term "acculturation," Rodnick's descriptions tend to reflect and reinforce an idea of cultural loss and assimilation into dominant Euro-American society. This focus is demonstrated in Rodnick's preface to his monograph: "Although the Sun-Dance is still given on July fourth and a few of the older full-bloods look nostalgically, to the days when the buffalo roamed the plains and

racks were filled with drying meat, yet little of the old way of life remains." He continues by stating,

> The aboriginal culture has been overtly lost by the group forty years and under, who form the vast majority of the reservation's population. The resultant sub-cultures formed may not be those found either among the urban or the rural dwellers of Montana, yet it would be difficult to say that they were Assiniboine in origin. (Rodnick 1938:1)

Reviews of Rodnick's work emphasized this basic conclusion. In a review published in *American Anthropologist*, Nathaniel Knowles commented, "Problems arising in the current period of adjustment appear to be engendered by a sense of failure to become white rather than through conflict between tenaciously held aboriginal beliefs and forcibly imposed foreign patterns" (Knowles 1938:724). According to his perspective, social tensions among the Fort Belknap community at the time were similar to other rural, economically depressed communities and were in no way connected to the fact that the community considered itself culturally distinct from dominant American society.

Flying not only had knowledge of Rodnick's work, but also believed that his texts offered an important correction to his description of community life. In his article, "Notes on the Material Culture of the Assiniboine Indians," Verne Dusenberry, an anthropologist who visited Fort Belknap in the late 1950s, mentioned that Flying's collection was actually inspired by Rodnick's study.[14] He wrote, "Flying read a copy of Rodnick's book when it appeared in 1938, and disillusioned by the inadequacy of the material, as he judged it, he began writing down some interviews of his own" (Dusenberry 1960:45). Importantly, there are similarities in Rodnick and Flying's approach to their ethnographic work. Reflecting a basic Boasian approach to cultural description, both men interviewed the eldest members of the tribe, discussed the need to document cultural practices before they no longer existed, and emphasized the collection of texts (see Darnell 2001:14–17). Furthermore, both men provided commentaries in their own writings that contained nostalgic views regarding pre-reservation cultural practices. However, their conclusions in regard to the contemporary Assiniboine community are radically different, and it is this fundamental disparity that fuels Flying's critique. Mark Flying, who was born in 1892 and therefore was in his late forties at the time of Rodnick's study, used his work with the Writers' Program to reject Rodnick's assessment that present community was no longer Assiniboine, and to emphasize and celebrate cultural continuity.

The Texts

Flying's own collection of texts contrasts directly with Rodnick's work. In addition to its ethnographic content, it was intended to be a model and a lesson in the appropriate ways to gather and disseminate knowledge according to Assiniboine standards. Rather than accepting Rodnick's belief that knowledge is objective and can be depersonalized, Flying relies on discursive practices which locate knowledge in specific individuals. This is evidenced by formal tendencies within Flying's texts, such as the recitation of lineages and the positioning of the narrator within those lineages which precedes most of the stories. These techniques mark the texts as "Assiniboine" and would be recognizable to the community members to whom Flying is directing his collection.

The texts are Flying's inscription of the interviews he conducted with various Assiniboine elders. These individuals were born during the 1860s and 1870s and therefore represented the generation whose own lives were shaped by both pre and post-reservation experiences. The majority of Flying's narrators were male, and the texts generally discuss practices common to men such as hunting and war parties; however, he did interview his mother, Two Woman, who provided insight to women's work and experiences. The texts range in length from short paragraphs to over twenty handwritten pages. They also range in subject matter: many concern the origins of the Assiniboine and the story of their emergence on the plains, others deal specifically with descriptions of material culture and daily activities such as hunting and cooking, and other narratives describe Assiniboine encounters with the U.S. military in the last years of the nineteenth century. In addition to these interviews Flying authored his own texts, including one about such material culture as crafting bows and spear points as well as hunting techniques. He also includes a lengthy text about the Buffalo and the Assiniboine which combines his own discussion with the stories of others. (Flying, Buffalo and The Assiniboine MSS, MHS).

Both Flying and his narrators reflect practices common to Assiniboine oral performances; specifically, that narrators acknowledge the source of their information, and that they demonstrate their authority to share the knowledge with others. This practice is still used within the community today at public gatherings. Individuals asked to speak generally begin with a discussion of who they are and why they have been asked to participate.[15] This recounting of personal accomplishments before public presentations is shared among many communities of the Northern Plains. As Elaine Jahner notes in regard to the practice among the Lakota, "The telling of one's own story was the occasion to prove that one

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had learned the lessons of the other tales and could add one's own deeds to the store of tales that marked the community's passage through time and space" (Jahner 1992:158). This practice reflects a fundamental belief that knowledge itself is individual and personal rather than universal and shared (Miller 1987:207). It is particularly true in regard to esoteric knowledge; the ability to collect and use medicine and rituals such as the medicine lodge and the hand game must either be given to an individual by an elder, or it must be purchased (see Gone 1992). The same idea extends to other cultural practices as well such as the authority to use particular songs or to tell particular stories.

Throughout the texts, both Flying and his narrators claim authority by asserting direct knowledge or experience of the events or stories described. At the end of a story about Buffalo and the Assiniboine, Flying states, "This is a story told by LAME CHICKEN, an Indian (Assiniboine) 88 years old, and claims it to be a personal experience" (Buffalo and Assiniboine MSS, MHS:14). In conclusion to her narrative concerning the origins and cultural practices of the Cut Throat Assiniboine, Two Woman asserts, "The things I am telling about I know to be true facts as they were, and of which I know of myself, personally to have been." She repeats this in her final sentence, stating "I have told just what I know to be true and what other Cut Throat Assiniboine know to be true" (Two Woman MSS, MHS:4).

If the stories are not from the individual's own experience, the narrators assert their rightful place in both receiving and telling the story by reciting lineages that connect them to the source material. Since knowledge is considered an individual's property, only those that have been given that knowledge directly have the privilege to retell the stories. Therefore, the new narrator must explicitly state his or her relationship to the originator of the information. In John Cloud's narrative regarding the history of the Cut Throat Assiniboine, he explains,

> This brief history of these people that I want to tell was told by my great grandfather Iron Eyes to his son, my grandfather, Male Crow or Na-Su-Na-Ziu, and he was the signer of the Treaty of 1851 at Ft. Laramie on behalf of the Santee (Isanyati) Indians and was killed shortly after his return, then a very old man at the time of his death. (Cut Throat Assiniboine MSS, MHS.)

John Cloud, as a direct descendant of Iron Eyes and the grandson of Male Crow, has a legitimate claim to the knowledge in the story. His introduction also indicates a key authorizing element, the respectability and reliability of the source. In this case, the originating source is Iron

Eyes who is recognized as an authority not only by his participation in the treaty negotiations, but also by the fact that he was an "old man" when he died which refers to a lifetime of accumulated knowledge and wisdom.

By adhering to the formal rules guiding Assiniboine storytelling within his own writing, Flying reifies and solidifies the position of the elders as cultural authorities and thus authorizes the information contained in the stories that follow. Throughout the collection, Flying shows deference to these narrators by commenting on their age and authority within the community. In regard to Bull Chief, Flying writes, "He is an Indian of respect among his people for the position he holds in one of their ceremonial rites of which this is a part" (Bull Chief MSS, MHS). With the exception of the texts that he authors, Flying is careful to state that the knowledge contained in his collection belongs to his interviewees and does not claim any knowledge as his own.

These lineage recitations not only feature prominently within the texts concerning Assiniboine origins and history, but are also commonly used in texts that concern daily life. A story about hunting practices narrated by Walking Chief begins with the following discussion:

> When I was a small boy my grandfather, a very old Assiniboine Indian by the name of "Half-Bear," who in his youth was a respectable man among his people because of his great deeds and exploits. Told me this story I am going to tell about the assiniboine Indian life before the white man came into this country. This story was told to "Half Bear" when he was small by his grandfather from which it will be seen that the story is original and true. (Walking Chief MSS, MHS).

Walking Chief not only uses lineages to situate the knowledge, but also asserts that the story gains veracity by its transmission through succeeding generations. "Truth" stems from two, equally important processes: acknowledging a reliable source with whom he has a direct relationship, and precise replication of the story from one generation to the next.

This idea of truth stemming from faithful renderings of embodied knowledge is reflected by many of the narrators. The same process can also be observed in Two Woman's narrative. After providing an account of her lineage that stretched to a time "before the white man with his ways had invaded the territory of the Cut-Throat Assiniboine," Two Woman, offers the following metadiscursive commentary:

> The Cut Throat Assiniboine history as told by our grandparents and passed down to us by word of mouth was told to us in such a way that it could be retold over and over without making an

> addition to it. This is the beautiful part of all Indian storytellers to pass it on word for word, never making a change. (Two Woman MSS, MHS:1).

She follows this discussion with a detailed description of cultural practices such as stone boiling, extracting oil, making glue, and various cooking techniques. By framing her story with this commentary, she gives authority to the knowledge contained within the narrative in two ways: she follows the established protocol in acknowledging her sources, and she states that the stories are "beautiful." In the first case, she connects her narrative with her grandparents' stories, thereby directly linking the present community with the past. In the second case, Two Woman's assertion demonstrates that adherence to form not only validates the knowledge, but also has aesthetic value.[16] This commentary transforms her narrative from a discussion of various types of practices to a story that relates how cultural knowledge should be transmitted. Within her narrative, Two Woman encourages her son to think not only about the content of the story, but also the act of storytelling.

But Flying's stories are not simply the transcription of traditional oral narratives, but rather illustrate a blending of oral and written forms as well as Assiniboine and English. While Flying's narrators employ techniques that are similar to oral performances, they also recognize the fact that these texts will be written down. John Cloud begins his history of the Assiniboine with the following statement, "I am a French-Santee (Isanyati) Dakota Indian born about 91 years ago. I want to place on record a short statement of the past history of the Cut Throat Assiniboine as it was passed down for many generations by our forefathers" (Cloud MSS, MHS:1.) While the formal techniques that are associated with oral performances are used, there is awareness among the narrators that these texts are something quite different.

This most explicit difference is, of course, that the written texts are in English rather than Assiniboine. As a fluent speaker of both languages, Flying is charged with the task of offering the best possible translation of Assiniboine concepts into English.[17] This act of translation, however, threatens the authority he claims. As the Walking Chief and Two Woman narratives cited above assert, cultural authority emanates from the precise repetition of the stories. Flying's texts are not the exact words, but rather the translations of Assiniboine stories into English texts. Further, many words and concepts are lost in the process of translation.

Flying is aware of this problem and addresses it in his letters. He wrote to Kennedy, "Let me say right here that like many other Indian words besides INK-TO-MI, Webster must did not have [*sic*] the words for

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them because we have no translation for them" (Mark Flying to Michael Kennedy, April 22, 1941, NARA-DEN). But his awareness of oratorical style allows him to maintain the essential structure of Assiniboine storytelling despite translation. While much is necessarily lost in the movement, Flying is able to maintain what he perceives as key elements which link the new narratives with the words of the ancestors. The act of translation and his conscious reflection about it in his letters to Kennedy actually solidifies Flying's authoritative role.

Assiniboine words do appear in limited and specific ways, and their use within the texts reinforces the importance of contextualized and individualized knowledge. When Assiniboine terms are used, they are almost exclusively personal and place names. Flying's translation of Bull Chief's narrative is illustrative of this use. He writes,

> Has the Knife (Mina-Yuke-Na), another great chief and a mighty leader and direct lineage of Leads Guarding (A-wan-yak A-yesa) lead his Assiniboine people to roam over the vast regions and area extending from where the (Hohe Wakpa) Assiniboine River (o-ha-ha) empties into the Big Water (Mi-ni-tonga) (Winnepeg [*sic*] Lake) in the direction where the sun comes up to the Big Rock Mountains (In-yan-he-tonga) toward where the sun goes down. (Bull Chief MSS, MHS:2.)

The place names are particularly interesting since Flying provides not only a direct translation of the Assiniboine term into English, but also the common English term. For example, the direct translation for "Mi-ni-tonga" is "Big Water," which has a different connotation from "Lake Winnepeg" [*sic*], the name bestowed by Euro-Americans, and speaks to the importance of the lake in the pre-contact history of the Assiniboine. The inclusion of Assiniboine terms not only adds specificity, but also marks the texts as authentic. While the texts are in English, they are still viewed as emanating from an original and identifiable source.

While Flying understands that his collection was intended for a wide audience, he sees it as aiding future generations of Assiniboines as well. Therefore, Flying's knowledge of how to tell stories is critical. By employing a specific framing technique, Flying demonstrates his knowledge of Assiniboine oratorical practice and in so doing is able to create and claim an authoritative discursive space that the "novice" outsiders cannot. As Elaine Jahner observes, "Transmission reveals the genealogy of authority. The historical reality of that transmission is every bit as essential to understanding a group as the propositional content of any narrative, historical or otherwise" (Jahner 2001:19). While he might not be

able to make claims to the content in the stories, Flying is able to display his own cultural proficiency by maintaining distinctly Assiniboine narrative structures. It is this expertise that Flying assumes will be recognizable to the Assiniboine community to whom he is addressing his collection.

The Letters

In addition to his texts, Flying wrote lengthy cover letters to Michael Kennedy that contained his own reflections on a number of topics related to the project as well as the act of collecting. Flying used the letters to introduce the texts, and must be considered a critical part of his writing. The letters include Flying's thoughts regarding change within the community as well as the inability of past researchers to understand Assiniboine culture. In addition, he uses the letters to mention noticeable omissions within his own text collection thus highlighting the partial nature of cultural description. Finally, Flying uses the letters to explicitly comment on the ideas regarding cultural knowledge and transmission that he addresses discursively in the texts.

The theme of cultural change and transition figures prominently within the letters to Kennedy. In many passages that are marked by considerable nostalgia, Flying recognizes that Assiniboine culture is in the midst of change, and that some practices are becoming obsolete. In his foreword to his work, Flying laments, "[I]t is far too late to study the Assiniboine Indian in his most characteristic ancient life or endeavor to save and preserve what is left of the silent peculiarities [*sic*] of his great historical past" (Flying, Foreword, MHS). This sentiment is shared by a number of Flying's narrators as well. In his narrative, John Cloud declares, "It is rather too late and regrettable to attempt a thorough record of these great people who just but very recently adopted the white man's way of life, and when those who had lived this life have now all passed on, leaving just a scattered few who are at this writing ready to follow the way of the rest" (Cloud MSS, MHS:1). Although he concedes that already much has been lost, Flying still believes that his efforts have value for the Assiniboine community. He continues, "[H]e still can contribute to the movement of a growing interest in his past with much accuracy if he just desire to do so" (Flying, Foreword, MHS). Unlike Rodnick, Flying views Assiniboine culture as persistent, but threatened.

While Flying shows respect for his narrators in the texts, he uses the letters to criticize elders who are unwilling to pass on the knowledge that they possess and are authorized to tell. Rather than blaming the younger generation as Rodnick does for cultural loss, Flying expresses frustra-

tion at his own narrators who he sees as being stingy with some of their valuable knowledge. In the preface to a story by Talks Different, Flying writes, "This man has a good background for basic history if he would only 'let go' of some of his knowledge pertaining to the Cut Throat Assiniboine. . . . If he would only realize how valuable his permanent worth would be to his future people, and reveal and make known what was previously concealed to all encroachers." According to Flying, this attitude was not exceptional, but rather endemic among the elders. He continued, "This [belief] applies to all of the Cut Throat's old people in general" (Cut Throat Weapons MSS, MHS). Flying sees this failure to pass on stories as the greatest threat to the younger generations. His admonishment also serves as a reminder to the elders as to their critical role in knowledge production. Aware that future generations of Assiniboines were at risk of losing cultural traditions, Flying believed his collection was vital for the continuance of the community.

Flying also uses his letters to discredit former studies of the Fort Belknap community and thereby disavow anthropological knowledge. In many of his letters, Flying suggests that previous researchers had been fooled into believing that they had gained insight into Assiniboine culture. In a direct reference to anthropologists who compensated people in order to gain information, he writes, "The historical fact of the Assiniboine in its true nature has never been successfully recorded by the many attempts by different writers. Writers have paid him large sums of money for which he exposed little or nothing in his return." He continues,

> He [the Assiniboine] is ever suspicious and flaunts nothing nor divulge anything of his quite mysterious past to no mistrustful seekers of information who are of no importance to him. What you suppose to find about him and his past are your own impression and belief about him for he has taught you nothing. (Mark Flying to Michael Kennedy, April 22, 1941)

In this passage, Flying casts the Assiniboine as a trickster figure who willingly allows others to perpetuate misinformation about him rather than providing any substantive details of cultural life. These conscious acts of deception on the part of the Assiniboine recur throughout Flying's narrations. In his text entitled, "The Buffalo and the Assiniboine," Flying interrupts his narrative and writes, "It is only natural that you should like to know something of the distinguishing traits and peculiarities of particular importance of these people. Writers who devote much study of him learn nothing. He gives you no direct information which concerns

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the queer side of his life." Flying continues this passage by stating that the Assiniboine community has "caused many a pen point to go astray" (Buffalo and Assiniboine MSS, MHS:8). According to Flying, previous works cannot be trusted—not necessarily because the researchers were dishonest, but rather because the researchers were deliberately misled.

Flying uses "whiteman" and "novices" interchangeably to refer to outsiders who are ignorant of the ways in which to properly acquire knowledge; however, he is aware that even as a tribal member, he is susceptible to misinterpretations and that he too must follow appropriate protocol in gathering information. In a letter chronicling some of the problems he encountered, he writes, "Sometimes I get nothing. These old people don't come right out and tell you what you want to know." He immediately adds, "There is authentic history, legend, [and] lore to be gotten from these old people if you just know how to work among them" (Mark Flying to Michael Kennedy, April 22, 1941). For Flying, his position as a tribal member does not grant him control over privileged information; rather, his position as an insider provides him with the skills to responsibly acquire and disseminate information. In a letter regarding Bull Chief's narrative, he writes, "I also realize that I must be thankful to my Assiniboine people in recording just what they give me to record" (Mark Flying to Michael Kennedy, May 28, 1941). Flying acknowledges that the community, not the ethnographer, should control what information is disseminated and in what form.

Many of Flying's letters also indicate that his enthusiasm for collecting stories was conditional, and that he would not provide any information that the community considered private or sacred. This differs from Rodnick's work which includes thorough discussions of religious ceremonies such as the sweat lodge, vision quests, and sun dance. Throughout his article, "An Assiniboine Horse-Raiding Expedition," Rodnick details what could be considered secret if not sacred knowledge; primarily the visions of a number of individuals as well as the medicines that were used to protect the men from the enemy (Rodnick 1939:615). While Flying provides a wealth of information regarding daily life, there is virtually no discussion of sacred practices in his collection.

This refusal to disclose information illustrates epistemological differences between Flying and the state office regarding appropriate uses of knowledge. Kennedy intended the "Indian Series" to be distributed widely by a national press, and therefore continually pressed his fieldworkers to be attentive to the needs of non-Native audiences. In a letter, Kennedy insisted that Flying not only be more specific in his descriptions of material culture, but also provide further contextualization and explanation

of the collected stories. Flying, however, recognized that there were cultural restraints and prohibitions regarding the material he collected. He responded to the letter, stating, "Remember Mr. Kennedy that some of this work has long remain[ed] a secret with my people" (Mark Flying to Michael Kennedy, April 23, 1941, MHS). Flying acknowledged that his contributions were not complete, and that specific information must be concealed in order to maintain appropriate conditions for the dissemination of esoteric knowledge.

Finally, Flying admits that the act of representation, even by a community insider, will always be limited. Soon after beginning his work, Flying wrote to Kennedy, "After I had familiarized myself with the briefly outlined task which I had been assign[ed] to, I then realized how handicapped my position would be in regard to a successful accomplishment of my work in the recording of the life of my people" (Mark Flying to Michael Kennedy, April 22, 1941). Flying can talk only to a certain number of elders, and can travel only to a certain number of locations. Ultimately he represents the individuals with whom he has spoken, not the entire Assiniboine community. This disclosure distinguishes Flying's collection from other ethnographic works which are similarly partial but claim to represent a cultural whole. Despite this acknowledgment, Flying sees his work as a crucial representation of the Assiniboine community. In a letter in which he promotes his writing and artistic abilities, he states that his works for the FWP, "will be original" and "have never been reproduced by other worker." (Mark Flying to Michael Kennedy, April 23, 1941). Though it may not be complete, Flying maintains that his work is both singular and important.

Conclusions

As mentioned previously, Flying's work was not published during the tenure of the project. This fact does not diminish the significance of Flying's collection. Flying intended for his work to be published, and therefore wrote the texts in a way that would be recognizable as authoritative among community members. His letters, which were not intended for publication, functioned as a way of contextualizing the project for Kennedy and others on the editorial staff. His criticism of previous researchers served to distinguish his collection and can also be read as a warning to Kennedy against excessive editing and rewriting. In response to a letter from Kennedy, Flying writes, "According to your first letter, the thing that you want is the Indian in his life before the whiteman's time. Please remember that I too am an Assiniboine Indian and what I say would of course have a bearing on me as well" (Mark

Flying to Michael Kennedy, April 22, 1941). While his collection might not be exactly what Kennedy envisioned, Flying asserts it is undeniably Assiniboine.

Flying's collection also provides an alternative narrative to the ethnographic work produced by anthropologists during the same period. Despite sharing methodological approaches as well as certain sympathies, Rodnick and Flying's work can be read in opposition to each other. In both form and content, Rodnick's descriptions emphasize cultural loss as the Fort Belknap community transitioned from an Assiniboine past to a Euro-American future. Conversely, Flying's texts emphasize continuity and cultural vibrancy. In both the texts and the letters, Flying asserts that Assiniboine culture is not waning, but rather is inaccessible to those who do not fully understand it. According to Flying, the invisibility of Assiniboine culture to those whom he terms "encroachers" is due to their inability to properly acquire knowledge as well as the Assiniboine community's deliberate misleading of them. In the end, the collection illustrates Flying's attempt to reestablish control over representations of Assiniboine culture and reject the "expert" knowledge that was influencing Indian policy.

In so doing, Flying actually inhabits two simultaneous roles, those of critic and ethnographer; Flying disrupts anthropological knowledge while producing sound ethnographic work. His letters to the state office, which caution Kennedy about the problems of comprehensive cultural description and question the ethnographer's authority, prefigure the critique of anthropology by Native scholars such as Vine Deloria Jr. and by those within the field itself (Strong 2004:345). But the actual texts as well as the methods that he employs echo the established Americanist tradition and anticipate later theoretical developments in the field. By consciously drawing attention to narrative form in his texts, and speaking about appropriate ways to generate authority, Flying's work foreshadows later anthropological approaches such as Ethnopoetics and the Ethnography of Speaking (Hymes 1981; Bauman and Sherzer 1991). In other words, in the decades that followed Flying's collection, anthropologists began to listen intently to the ways in which people were telling stories, and discovered that meaning is contained in form as well as content; lessons that Flying already knew well.

While Flying's primary interest was not to reform anthropology or rethink theoretical positionings, he was concerned with the consequences of anthropological practice and writing. Therefore, his work should be viewed as a critical voice in the history of anthropology. Recently both Regna Darnell and Robin Ridington have used the idea of the Trickster

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to understand how Native writers and scholars engage with the established ethnographic canon (Darnell 2001:248–251; Ridington 1999). They argue that these authors, in true trickster fashion, challenge and invert received Western epistemologies by illuminating other, multiple ways of seeing; through this process of disassembly, they create something new. Flying's work with Writers' Project illustrates that Tricksters have been at work among us for a long time now, and that we still need to heed their voices.

Notes

In citing works in the text the following abbreviations have been used:

MHS U.S. Works Progress Administration Records, Federal Writers Project, Folder Land of Nakoda (Research Materials), Box 17, Manuscript Collection 77, Montana Historical Society Archives

NARA-DEN Records of the Bureau of Indian Affairs, Box 133. Correspondence Files 1917–1938, Records Group 75, National Archives Branch Depository

1. This discussion is inspired by Mikhail Bakhtin's influential writings on authoritative discourse found in his essay "Discourse and the Novel" (Bakhtin 1981:344–345).

2. For an overview of the Federal Writers' Project see Bold 1999; Brewer 1994; Hirsch 2003; Mangione 1996; and Penkower 1977.

3. For a discussion of Native American representations in the FWP see Isernhagen 2001 and Morgan 2005.

4. Edward Kennard was a student of Franz Boas who served as the editor for the "Indians and Archaeology" Section of the American Guide Series and Benedict was teaching at Columbia. While some preliminary research was conducted by graduate students during the summer of 1937, the study was not concluded because of a lack of funding. The second proposed study was terminated in 1942 as a result of the channeling of FWP money and resources into the war effort.

5. *Land of Nakoda* focused exclusively on the Assiniboine community at Fort Peck. The book was republished with a new introduction by Michael Kennedy as *The Assiniboines* (1961). See Morgan 2005 for a more detailed discussion of the project and the reaction of the national office.

6. In Montana alone there were at least six tribal members engaged in the project. Raymond Gray and Carl Wheeler both amassed a great deal of material during the project for the Rocky Boy and Northern Cheyenne communities respectfully. Gone's collections as well as materials from the Blackfeet Reservation can be found in the Merrill G. Burlingame Special Collections at Montana State University, Collection 2336, and Gray and Wheeler's collections are located in MHS, Manuscript Collection 77.

7. Fort Belknap continues to attract anthropological interest. A variety of texts have been published about and in collaboration with the Assiniboine and Gros Ventre communities. These include, but are not limited to, Farnell 1995, Fowler 1987, and Miller 1987.

8. Alfred Kroeber published "Gros Ventre Myth and Tales" and "Ethnology of the Gros Ventre," in the *Anthropological Papers of the American Museum of Natural History* based on his fieldwork at Fort Belknap (Kroeber 1907, 1908). Robert Lowie also published "The Assiniboine" in the *Anthropological Papers of the American Museum of Natural History* (Lowie 1909).

9. Kunitz (1971) situates Collier's thoughts regarding society within the larger intellectual movement occurring at the same time. For more discussion regarding the AAU, including internal struggles between anthropologists and administrators, see Stocking 1992:163–164; Szasz 1999:55–59; and Castile 2004: 272–274. For an extensive discussion of Scudder Meekel see Biolsi 1997.

10. Rodnick reported on the Fort Belknap community's response to the IRA to John Collier while he was on the reservation in 1935. He also reported on conditions on the Blackfeet Reservation in Montana for the AAU from 1936–37.

11. Rodnick did graduate studies under Edward Sapir at Yale University, but actually completed his degree at the University of Pennsylvania.

12. See Darnell (2001:191–200) for more discussion regarding cultural relevatism, Ruth Benedict and the idea of cultural configurations.

13. See Biolsi 1997 for a discussion of the limits of this approach in Scudder Meekel's work at Pine Ridge reservation.

14. In the article, Dusenberry states that Flying started the project on his own, and ceased because of failing eyesight and the lack of an adequate typist. He does not mention that the collection was part of the Writers' Project. It is unclear whether this is an oversight by Dusenberry or if Mark Flying chose not to discuss the Writers' Project with him.

15. I worked and conducted fieldwork at Fort Belknap in the late 1990s and observed this technique frequently. For example, it often occurred during events held at Fort Belknap College when elders were asked to speak to students and staff.

16. My thanks to Richard Bauman, who pointed out the importance of aesthetics in the authorization process.

17. Clark mentions to Kennedy that Flying knows Assiniboine (H. N. Clark to Michael Kennedy, March 6, 1941, NARA-DEN.) His knowledge of English is evidenced by the collection itself as well as the fact that he attended the Fort Belknap Agency Boarding school.

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